

CONTRIBUTION OF THE PESTICIDE ACTION NETWORK ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (PAN AP) TO THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 2012 (RIO+20)

Assessing the 20 years of Rio

Rio's twin failures 20 years after the Agenda 21 – an unprecedented ecological crisis and the global economy sinking into a protracted depression manifesting in a worst jobs crisis, poverty and hunger, and poor social outcomes – are telling that the direction of Rio+20 should be more than institutional reforms. Global leaders must recognize at this point that the concept of sustainable development has only been a weak undercurrent to the mainstream of neoliberal globalization. Today's global problems – food crisis, climate crisis, ecological crisis and economic crisis – are all brought about by the reckless, profit-oriented patterns of production and consumption that neoliberal globalization has intensified for decades. **Rio+20 is expected thus to extricate itself from the same policies of open multilateral trading system, privatization, capital liberalization and the like on which Rio was originally based.**

This also entails the **rejection of growth indicators such as international trade and development aid, fiscal reforms, market infrastructure, financial mobilization and the like, and market-based solutions such as carbon trading, carbon market, pricing of and investments in natural resources.**

Food Sovereignty as a mechanism for sustainable development

Rio+20 is expected to be framed within food sovereignty, a progressive concept that represents basic human rights, since sustainable development after all is about the right to self-determination and sovereignty over natural wealth and resources and embodies the whole range of economic and social rights. **Rio+20 is also expected to put premium on ecological limits first instead of aiming for growth and setting limits to growth later – limits that are always applied on people's well-being but not on profits.**

Following these calls for framework thus entails **global policy-making placing due emphasis on the role of agriculture in ensuring that basic human rights and sovereignty are respected. Rio+20 must recognize the role of small-scale, biodiversity-based and ecological agriculture that is being practiced by millions of food producers round the world in achieving both food security and environmental soundness.** This should be the core and foundation of any economy that is aimed at replacing the current one that is in crisis.

"Greening" the same old roadmap

The proposal of a "green economy" has many pitfalls for those aspiring for food sovereignty. One of these is the explicit proposal to price natural resources and all other resources of the economy including human knowledge, assuming it would discourage transnational corporations (TNC) plunder, but actually introducing the complete commodification of nature and ecosystem services. The green economy treats nature and ecosystems as tradeable assets, thereby completing the privatization of commons.

It openly proposes the privatization of knowledge, whether common or indigenous, promoting intellectual property rights (IPRs) and patents by citing that such investments in R&D and innovation may generate “innovation rents”, which are nothing but royalties. It even assumes that innovations have “global marketability” thus can be patented, licensed and marketed widely. One way thus to curtail this tendency is to **avoid altogether in Rio+20 the discussion of World Trade Organisation (WTO)-plus issues such as IPRs, innovation and resource pricing that remained contentious up to the collapse of WTO talks.**

The green economy is not only picking up lost causes in the failed negotiations in the multilateral trading system but also **pushing for the contentious issues in the climate conferences, including REDD+ (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation including conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest stocks)**, which is a mechanism to allow industrialized countries to continue their emissions as long as they pay some forest sector somewhere in the Third World. **This should not be the content of Rio+20 and not extended to ocean carbon or even soil carbon as the green economy proposes.**

Renewable energy and low-carbon technologies should be promoted and supported. But it should not be within the framework of a carbon market and pricing just to entice investors. One positive mechanism is the **phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies and replacement by government incentives such as feed-in tariffs, direct subsidies and tax credits** to make renewable energy attractive to investors. Yet, the green economy also proposes these incentives to be attached to the emissions trading scheme, which basically is a system that allows heavy CO₂ emitters to just pay for their excess emissions. **Non-market-based solutions and community-managed renewable energies should be explored by Rio+20.**

In agriculture, the green economy relies correctly on the development of smallholder farming, which however is incorrectly pegged at global investments, trade and agri-business. **Various issues that may have been overlooked or downplayed in the proposal to green agriculture must be the content of Rio+20 discussions. These include trading cartels that control production and trade, ownership and access structures that can get in the way of its goals of increasing productivity and farm yields, shifting farmers' incomes from rents and loan interests to basic commodities and services by freeing them from tenancy and usury.**

The bottomline of action and outcome indicators of green economy in agriculture must also be reviewed as these are quite problematic. **These are policy measures that include trade and export policies and payments for ecosystem services through agriculture, whereas a review on the impact of decades-long agricultural trade liberalization and privatization of irrigation and agricultural infrastructure on poor farmers is yet to be done.** The green economy is also looking at government support where there is none to begin with for farmers to convert to green agriculture and to achieve environmental targets. It is endorsing the IPR regime and liberalization of services by proposing to eliminate barriers to trade in technologies and services needed for the transition to green agriculture.

There is also danger in relying on donor support, specifically official development assistance (ODA), and in openly endorsing the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investments (RAI) by the World Bank and others, which has served as the license for the continuation of the massive, global foreign land acquisitions that are happening. The green economy is enticing private funds, institutional investors and speculators to invest in agriculture, specifically in corporations that manufacture and market agricultural products and inputs and those that provide services. The “enabling environment” of the green economy itself is problematic as private and public investments are emphasised and, without reservations, invites leading agribusiness corporations and financial institutions to cash in on green economy, with IPRs, prices and other market mechanisms as appeal. In the words of the UNEP, “... these companies have the power to determine, to a large extent, how the global agriculture sector could endorse and encourage green and sustainable farming practices.”

This is problematic as these food and agri-chemical TNCs and financial institutions do not have record of sustainable farming practices and genuine support to smallholder agriculture, in the same way that ODA carries conditionalities that are not specific on biodiversity-based, ecological agriculture but rather on technology, capital, micro credit and government legislation to facilitate the corporations. **Instead of funding and investments, Rio+20 must prioritize the broader participation of the communities and basic sectors, paying close attention to economic democracy, gender justice and ecological sustainability.**

The calls for the rejection of commodification and commercialization of nature, carbon trading, market-based solutions, TNC technology and biotechnology, foreign land acquisitions as well as setting aside food production for the sake of “alternative” energy production should reverberate on the road to Rio. **Policies should focus on food sovereignty as the overarching framework to deal with the food crisis; prioritizing small-scale agriculture based on biodiversity and ecology and putting an end to the entire wasteful and unsustainable chain of corporate agriculture; promoting a consumption and lifestyle pattern that covers the basic food and water needs for everyone’s well-being; and supporting research for community conservation and management.**

Ultimately the discussions should focus on revolutionizing the growth indicators with priority on broader social goals such as food security, education for all, health, gainful employment and ecological sustainability. Growth indicators should be guided by ecological limits and the correct application of human knowledge and technology, which incorporates ecological integrity and health, gender justice, and cultural diversity.

Pesticide Action Network (PAN) is a global network working to eliminate the human and environmental harm caused by pesticides and to promote biodiversity-based ecological agriculture. PAN Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP) is committed to the empowerment of people especially women, agricultural workers, peasant and indigenous farmers. We believe in a people-centred, pro-women development through food sovereignty, ecological agriculture and sustainable lifestyles.

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